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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature addresses key considerations in the friendships of children with intellectual disabilities and is organized into four areas of friendship: perceptions, sports, social skills training, and setting effects. The study found that children with disabilities view their social relationships with peers favorably, despite the limited quantity of such relationships. Additionally, children with disabilities have limited access to peers and have limited skills in establishing friendships. Results suggest that children with disabilities would benefit from more exposure to peers in all settings. Other findings include: students with intellectual disabilities in mainstreamed schools tended to have more friends than similar students in special schools; participation in sports improved the self-esteem and friendship activity for students with intellectual disabilities; children with disabilities have very little contact with peers outside of school; training in social skills increased the number of social interactions (mostly positive) for children with disabilities; and peer training in social skills is the most effective. (Contains 24 references.) (DB)

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Friendships of Children with Disabilities

Claudia Saenz

Submitted to the faculty of the Department
of Special Education at Northeastern Illinois University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts.

May 2003

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Abstract

This paper addresses key considerations of friendships of children with intellectual disabilities. A literary search was conducted to address four areas of friendships: perceptions, sports, social skills training and setting effects. Based on the review of literature, children with disabilities view their social relationships with peers favorable, despite the limited quantity. Additionally, children with disabilities have limited access to peers and skills to establish friendships. Research indicates that children with disabilities could benefit from more exposure to peers in all settings.

Introduction

Socialization is part of every child's growth and development. Social competence is a critical developmental competency (Brown, Odom & Conroy, 2001). Establishing friendships is a complex task for any child but even more for a child with a disability. Children with disabilities have peer interaction difficulties (Brown, Odom & Conroy, 2001). A child with a disability is defined as a child evaluated as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, any other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (Turnbull, 1997).

A friend is someone attached to another by affection or esteem; a favored companion (Merriam-Webster, 2002). Friendships with peers in childhood serve many functions that can contribute to the quality of life of the child. They help children's' social development, they provide companionship, they can provide feelings of community and social support. Friendships assist children to learn about themselves and mature, they provide security and validation of self esteem. Without friends, a child can feel lonely and isolated (Geisthardt, Brotherson & Cook, 2002).

Research indicates a link between children's self worth and friendships (Vaughn, 2001). According to Vaughn, children with disabilities need at least one friend to increase their self perception. Also, children with disabilities often times feel more rejection than acceptance from their peers. Children with disabilities tend to have fewer

friends and have less exposure to peers. Despite this, children with disabilities are not without friends (Vaughn. 2001).

This paper presents a review of the research on the friendships of children with disabilities. Four areas of friendships are addressed: perceptions, sports, social skills training and setting effects. The review of the literature on perceptions of friendships of children with disabilities gives insight into the quality and quantity of friendships of these children. How many friends do children with disabilities have and what is the quality of those friendships? What barriers are they encountering in establishing interactions? The research on sports and friendships, explores the benefits of children with disabilities involvement in sports. It provides an area for social interaction outside of academia. In addition, the literature on social skills training addresses issues of parental involvement and teacher intervention. What are the best interventions for social skills trainings, if any? Finally, appropriate setting is a much debated question for children with disabilities (Freeman, 2000). Accessibility and placement are major concerns especially with the inclusion movement.

Methodology

In order to thoroughly review the topic of this paper, various databases were accessed to determine if there were sufficient sources to research this topic. The databases used in this research were ERIC, Wilson Select Plus, Academic Search Elite and Professional Development Collection. The following keywords were used: learning disabilities, disability, intellectual disability, mentally handicapped, mental retardation, friends, friendships, relationships and social interactions. The search was limited to only peer reviewed journals dated from 1993 to 2003. In addition to searching the databases, a manual search of the stacks at Northeastern Illinois University library was completed.

After all the references were gathered, it was found that a few were not primary sources and those were used in the introduction of this paper. The sources for review were limited to only primary sources. In addition, the writer eliminated the sources that were not directly related to the topics of friendships and intellectual disabilities. The abstracts were read to determine, which sources were the most relevant to this topic.

Review of literature

Perceptions

The social interactions of children with disabilities affect the perception the child has of himself. Children who are often rejected are likely to have a lower self image (Luftig, 2001). Quality and quantity of friendships affect self image, self perception, social status and social success. Additionally, parental perceptions of their child's friendships affect the perceptions the child has on his own friendships, as well as himself.

Margalit (1996) investigated how children with learning disorders view themselves and their friendships. The participants were from eight schools in the central region of Israel. There were 230 students ranging from 7 to 10 years old. The students were divided into three groups. One group was the students with learning disabilities. This group consisted of 57 boys and 37 girls. Another group was 65 low achieving students. This group consisted of 35 boys and 30 girls. The third group was the average achieving students. There were 71 students in this group, 37 boys and 34 girls.

The teachers were asked to complete a rating scale questionnaire. The students in the groups were matched based on their age and gender. Low achieving students were matched with average achieving students. The students completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires covered five areas related to relationships. The first area covered by the questionnaire was loneliness and social dissatisfaction. The second area covered was the coherence felt by the students in school. It measured confidence, manageability and understating of their environment. The third area addressed was the quality of the student's friendships. The fourth area was peer acceptance. This helped determine the

peer status of each student. The fifth area was a measure of reciprocal friendship. It measured children who had nominated each other as friends.

Teachers were asked to complete a two part questionnaire. The first part measured the child's hyperactive behaviors and the second measured the child's aggressive and disruptive behaviors. The questionnaires were in Hebrew and were completed in their classes.

Margalit (1996) found that the low achieving students reported more loneliness, less peer friendships and less coherence than their average achieving peers. These students were rated by their teachers as more disruptive and hyperactive. Placement in special classroom did not play a role in the results, since low achieving peers in regular classroom were not significantly different from their learning disabled peers.

Freeman and Kasari (2002) examined the friendships of children with Down syndrome. There were 54 children participants, 27 children with Down syndrome and their 27 friends without disabilities. The children were between the ages of 5 and 11 years old. Of the 27 children with Down syndrome, 10 were boys and 17 were girls. Of the 27 children without disabilities, 9 were boys and 18 were girls.

The parents of the children with Down syndrome were contacted via phone and asked to participate in this research in return for a developmental assessment. The parents were to bring the child to the location and bring a friend of their child with them. The children were observed with their friends in two separate rooms for two minutes each. The children were instructed to play in any way they liked and that the researcher in the room would be doing some paperwork. Parents were asked to complete a

demographic questionnaire, as well as, participate in an interview. The interviewee asked parents about the friend, the child brought, as well as, other friends their child had.

The researchers found that the friends brought by the children with Down syndrome were often the same gender, age and ethnicity. The friends who were similar in age and gender had better friendships quality. They classified 20 of the 27 pairs, as friends based on their criteria. Those were found to take turns more often and regarded each other more positively.

Luftig (2001) examined the friendships of mildly mentally retarded and non retarded students. The study examined their skills at making friends, social competency and loneliness of the students. There were 386 students participants. 73 children had mental retardation, 181 children were matched to the children with mental retardation based on chronological age and 132 were matched to the children with disabilities based on mental age. All the children with mental retardation were in self contained classrooms in public school. All the children had some mainstreaming, either in academic or non academic subjects.

All the participants were give a 24 item rating scale. The proctors read the questions and answers to all the students to complete. The questionnaire took less than 30 minutes to complete.

Luftig (2001) concluded that children with mental retardation did not see difficulties in making friends. They did not feel less socially competent than their non disabled peers. The children with mental retardation reported more loneliness in school than their peers.

Turnball, Blue-Banning and Pereira (2000) researched the nature of friendships of 11 children with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. The children were ages 6 to 19 years old, with various disabilities, from different locations and from various Hispanic subgroups. The participants were interviewed individually and in a group situation.

Turnball, Blue-Banning and Pereira (2000) found that relatives were also perceived as friends by the children and their parents. They also found that some of the friends of the participants also had disabilities. Lastly, they found that the set of friends with the strongest bond had the widest gap in age.

Jerome, Fujiki, Brinton and James (2002) studied the self perceptions of children with language impairments and their peers without disabilities. The research participants were 80 children, half with specific language impairments and the other half with no disability. The participants with specific language impairments were from ages 6 to 13, all in mainstreamed classrooms and with no other diagnosis. The typically developing peers were also ages 6 to 13 years old. The children were randomly matched to peers. They were administered a scale to measure self perception. It was conducted in their school in one session.

Jerome, Fujiki, Brinton and James (2002) found that the younger children both with and without disabilities rated themselves positively in self perceptions, whereas the older children rated themselves differently. The older children with language impairments rated themselves lower on social competence, lower in social acceptance and lower in behavioral conduct. According to Jerome, Fujiki, Brinton and James, this

may internalize negative self perceptions and could lead to withdrawal from peers.

Overton and Rausch (2002) examined what mothers of children with disabilities considered important social goals and success for their children's friendships. There were a total of 11 mothers. The children ranged from ages 5 to 11 years old, with either mental retardation, learning disabilities, behavior disorders, developmental delays or another health impairment. Their children all participated in general education classes for some portion of the day.

The mothers were in one of three focus groups. The groups were conducted in an interview format. The group interview lasted from 90 to 120 minutes and were facilitated by a researcher. Overton and Rausch (2002) found that parents saw friendships as very important for their children. They felt they were important for their children's happiness, self esteem, self confidence, self-acceptance and social competence. Parents reported that positive friendships would have positive effects on their child's quality of life and negative friendships would affect them negatively.

Setting Effects

Due to the recent movement toward inclusion, setting is a major controversy for schools. Research supports that children need more exposure and social relationships with peers (Geisthardt, Brotherson & Cook, 2002). On the other hand, children with disabilities, engage in more problematic behaviors in inclusive settings to gain social acceptance and membership (Farmer, Van Acker, Pearl & Rodkin, 1999).

Heiman (2000) compared the quality and quantity of friendships of students with mild intellectual disabilities and students without intellectual disabilities in various

educational settings. Heiman investigated how adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities viewed their friendships. The participants were from various educational settings and were compared to peers without disabilities. Heiman had 575 students from central Israel involved in his research. He questioned the 304 boys and 271 girls, ranging from ages 12-15 years old. He divided the students into three groups, as follows: 121 students with mild intellectual disabilities attending 19 classes in special education, 189 students also with mild intellectual disabilities, from 15 self-contained classes in mainstreamed schools and 265 students in general education classes without disabilities.

Heiman (2000) gave the participants, the Hebrew translation of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire. The questionnaire examines 6 components related to friendships: defining a friend, settings for establishing friends, feelings of loneliness, reactions to those feelings, frequencies of those feelings and assistance in making friends. All the students with intellectual disabilities were interviewed with the questionnaire. The interviews lasted about twenty minutes and were conducted in their respective classrooms. The students without disabilities completed the questionnaire without their teachers. They completed the questionnaire in about ten minutes and were not interviewed.

The results demonstrated differences in how all students viewed their friendships. The students with intellectual disabilities in mainstreamed schools tended to have more friends than the students with intellectual disabilities in special schools. Students without disabilities tend to have more intimate friendships than those with disabilities.

Farmer, Van Acker, Pearl and Rodkin (1999) examined differences in peer

relations among students with and without disabilities. They assessed social networks and problem behaviors. The goal of this study was to generate information on aggressive and disruptive behavior and classroom social structure to improve the inclusion of disabled students in regular education classrooms. It examined classroom social structure and students interpersonal competence.

The research was conducted with fourth, fifth and six grade classes that had inclusion with students with disabilities. The classes were from Chicago, suburban Chicago and North Carolina. They sampled 31 classes from Chicago and 28 from North Carolina. The total number of students was 1540. The sample was about half female (49%) and half male (51%). The majority of the students were white (49%) and African American (44%). The other 7% were Hispanic. 83% of the students did not have disabilities and 17% had some form of disability.

The measures used were a Social Cognitive Map (SCM) and peer assessment. The SCM is a measure that instructs students to map students that hand around together a lot. The Peer Behavioral Assessments determines perceptions of peer social and behavioral characteristics. The students were given 10 specific items and they were to nominate three peers for each of the 10 items.

Farmer, Van Acker, Pearl and Rodkin (1999) found that the majority of aggressive problem behaviors were from non disabled students. They also found that peers nominated students with disabilities more frequently for problem behaviors. The researchers concluded that problem behaviors are highly supported by the social context. Hence, students with disabilities engage in problem behaviors to gain social acceptance

and membership.

Hall and McGregor (20002) researched peer relationships of children with disabilities in an inclusive school. This was a longitudinal study of three boys with disabilities and their classmates. The boys attended the same school, since kindergarten. The school was in Australia.

The three boys were Nathan, Mike and Manuel. Nathan had cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and an intellectual disability, as well as, limited verbal communication. He was also bound to a wheelchair. His kindergarten class had 21 children, 13 boys and 14 girls. Mike, also had an intellectual disability, as well as, hyperactivity and poor balance. His speech was difficult to understand. His kindergarten class had 20 children, 11 girls and 9 boys. His fifth grade class had 29 children, 12 boys and 17 girls. Manuel had Down syndrome. He was in first grade when he started participating. His class had 25 students, 13 boys and 12 girls. In his sixth grade class, there were 24 students, 7 boys and 17 girls.

Initially, the three boys were observed by the researcher in the playground. Sociometric measures were taken and peer interviews were conducted. In the upper grades, 4^{th} to 6^{th}, those measures were also used, as well as observational data of the classmates. The sociometric ratings consisted of the children selecting three children from their class with whom they would like to have a certain social interaction. The direct observations were 10 minute periods of measuring the occurrence of certain social behaviors. The interviews consisted of 1 to 4 questions on the selected child.

Hall and McGregor (2000) found that the three boys were selected by their peers for social interactions. Both male and females classmates chose the boys as playmates.

The three boys chose females playmates more frequently throughout the years. The researchers suggest this may be due to social development delays or possibly females being more accepting of students with disabilities. Two of the boys got lower social status in the upper grades. Also, all three boys had fewer peer relationships in the upper grades.

Buysse, Goldman and Skinner (2002) examined the setting effects on friendship formation. The participants were 333 preschool children, 120 children with disabilities and 213 typically developing children. The children ranged in age from 19 to 77 months. All the participants were enrolled in 45 classrooms in inclusive early childhood programs in North Carolina. The classrooms were both general education early childhood programs (25) and early childhood special education (20). All the teachers were female. The study was conducted in two settings: an inclusive early childhood setting and an inclusive child care program.

The teachers were given 4 questionnaires to complete: Playmates and Friends Questionnaire for Teachers, Teacher Ratings of Children's Social Development, ABILITIES index and Benefits and Drawbacks of Early Childhood Inclusion Setting Scale (Buysse, Goldman & Skinner, 2002). On the Playmates and Friends Questionnaire for Teachers, the teacher was asked to indicate the playmates for students and the frequency of their interaction. On the Teacher Ratings of Children's Social Development, the teacher rated the student's social competence. The ABILITIES index, measured the child's functional development. The Benefits and Drawbacks of Early Childhood Inclusion Rating Scale addressed the teachers attitudes about inclusion.

Buysse, Goldman and Skinner (2002) found that in specialized classrooms the typically developing children had more friends than the children with disabilities. However, in child care settings, the typically developing children and the children with disabilities had similar number of friendships. Also, child care classrooms had more playmates for both children, since the class size is larger. Children with disabilities formed less reciprocal friendships than their non disabled peers. Lastly, the research indicated that children with disabilities were more likely to have typically developing peers in the child care setting versus the specialized setting.

Kemp and Carter (2002) researched the social skills and social status of children with moderate intellectual disabilities. All the children had received preschool intervention. This was a longitudinal study. Kemp and Carter (2002) had 22 participants in their study. They were grades 1st through 5th. The children had mild to severe disabilities with most students with moderate disabilities. The participants were 14 boys and 8 girls.

Kemp and Carter (2002) used several measures to research the social skills and status of these mainstreamed children. Observations of the children in the playground were done. The participant child's classmates were interviewed to assess social status and rating scales were administered to the child's teachers, parents and the school principal.

Kemp and Carter (2002) found that the children with disabilities spent more time alone in the playground than their non disabled peers. Their peers spent more time interacting with friends. Kemp and Carter did not find a difference in the social status

between the children. Teachers and principals rated the child lower on social skills versus the parent's rating. They concluded that socialization may be more difficult for the child with disabilities than their non disabled peers.

Geisthardt, Brotherson and Cook (2002) examined the social experiences of children with disabilities in their home and neighborhood. The participants were 28 children with disabilities and their families. The children were 16 females and 12 males from 26 families. The majority of the families were 2 parent, Caucasian families.

The researchers conducted family interviews, home observations and gave families written questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the families prior to the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the homes. They were for the parents to share their experiences. The interviews were audio taped.

Geisthardt, Brotherson and Cook (2002) found that children with disabilities have very few contact with peers outside of school. They have very little contact outside of school with friends. Parents were involved in some friendships but for the most part did not get involved. Children with disabilities could benefit from social interactions outside of the school.

Pretty, Rapley and Bramston (2002) researched the experiences of the quality of life of adolescents with and without disabilities. There were 27 participants, 13 without disabilities and 14 with mild intellectual disabilities. Of the 13 without disabilities, 8 were males and 5 were females. Of the 14 with disabilities, 9 were males and 5 females. They ranged from 7th to 10th grade and were from 13 to 16 years old.

All the participants completed 5 questionnaires. The first was a demographic

questionnaire. The second was a Communities Facilities Checklist, which measured the participants awareness of community facilities, for recreation, shopping and eating. The third was a Lifestyles Questionnaire, which measured the relationships and activities of the participants. The fourth was an interview, which assessed the participant's perception of their neighborhood. The fifth was a Quality of the Student Life Questionnaire, which measured satisfaction, well being, social belonging and empowerment (Pretty, Rapley & Bramston, 2002).

Pretty, Rapley and Bramston (2002) found that all the participants were knowledgeable of community facilities. All the participants reported similar usage of the recreational families. Most of the participants (n=15) knew their friends from school, 9 from both school and their neighborhood and 3 only from their neighborhoods.

Sports

Children with disabilities can benefit from involvement in sports. Spots help support growth and development, as well as, shown to be beneficial in social interactions. According to the research, the involvement of children with disabilities in sports can have a positive effect on the child. Children improve in sports skills, as well as self esteem (Castagno, 2001).

Martin and Smith (2002) developed a research to examine the quality of friendships in youth disability sports. The participants were male and female athletes with disabilities, ages 9 to 18 years old. There were 85 males and 65 females from four countries. These were youths that competed in track and field and swimming.

The participants completed a demographic scale and a Sport Friendship Quality

Scale (SFQS). SFQS is a 22 item scale used to assess quality of youth sport friendships. The scales ranged from 1 to 5, not true to really true. The SFQS assessed four factors: self esteem and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, commonality, companionships and pleasant play (Martin & Smith, 2002). The participants were asked to think of their best friend in sports, write the name on the top of their survey and answer the survey related to that person.

Martin and Smith (2002) found that the participants concluded that their friendships had both positive and negative dimensions. The participants viewed the negative dimensions in terms of conflicts with their best friend. In terms of positive aspects of friendships, females reported more benefits from friendships than males. In terms of conflicts in friendships, no differences were found. In terms of the four friendships factors: loyalty and intimacy, self esteem and supportiveness, having things in common and playing together, females scored higher overall.

Castagno (2001) researched the change in male athletes during basketball season in Special Olympics Unified Sports. Social adjustment and life satisfaction are noted as benefits for athletes with mental retardation.

The participants were 6th to 8th grade athletes enrolled in the Unified Sports program. About half the students had developmental disabilities. There were 24 athletes with disabilities and 34 athletes without disabilities.

Six in instruments were used by Castagno (2001). Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test was administered to the participants to measure intellectual ability. The Self-Esteem Inventory is a twelve item questionnaire used to assess the student's self esteem.

The Basketball Sport Skills Assessment Test evaluated the basketball skills of the participants. The athletes were given the Adjective Checklist. The participants were asked to think of kids with mental retardation and select the words to describe kids with mental retardation. The Friendship Activity Scale lists 10 different activities. The athletes were asked to rate whether they would engage in each activity with a kid with mental retardation. The Unified Sports Questionnaire was used to rate the level of satisfaction with Unified Sports (Castagno, 2001).

Each athlete was given a 60 minute test battery prior to beginning Unified Sports. The participants were administered four tests initially: Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, the Self Esteem Inventory, the Adjective Checklist and the Friendship Activity Scale. The participants were administered the Basketball Sports Skills Assessment during the first week of the program.

Castagno (2001) found that Unified Sports improved the self esteem of all the participants. Also, she found that their basketball skills improved based on their behavior and after basketball skill measures. Positive adjectives for all athletes increased but no significant difference was noted in negative adjectives. Friendships Activity increased for all participants. Castagno concluded that Special Olympics Unified Sports was beneficial for all its participants.

Social Skills Training

Children with disabilities often lack the social skills involved in peer relations. Friendships involve a reciprocal relationship. A child with a disability needs to be taught those social skills. There are several methods to teach social skills, but which is the most

effective for children with disabilities?

Jobling (2000) developed a six session research program to explore the feelings of establishing and maintaining friendships of adolescents with Down syndrome. The participants were four females and three males from ages 18-21 years old. All the participants all lived at home with their families in Australia. All the participants had attended some type of school. The adolescents all were functioning in the moderate level range.

Session one explored feelings of hurt and jealousy. Jobling (2000) explored the nature of individual relationships. Session two explored types of relationships and personal trust. Trust was explored in their own current relationships. Session three explored family dynamics. Family structures were used to demonstrate roles and responsibilities of individuals. Session four explored qualities that a good friend possesses. Qualities that can be hurtful were compare to the qualities of a good friend. Session five explored the effects of gender on relationships. The sixth session explored adult relationships and marriage.

Jobling (2000) found that all the participants were involved and enjoyed the research program. He concluded that programs designed to help individuals with down syndrome, need to help enhance the friendships already established in the program. He also found that for this type of program to be effective, the concepts need to be taught in concrete ways and the participants need for their privacy to be respected.

Helper (1994) researched to importance of social skills intervention. In addition, Helper studied the effects of these interventions of mainstreaming and peer relations of

children with disabilities. The research involved 41 fifth graders, 27 boys and 14 girls. 26 of the participants did not have a disability and 15 had severe learning disabilities. All the participants were administered two measures, a rating scale and a nominations questionnaire. The rating scale measured social status and acceptance, as well as, overall self image. The nominations questionnaire instructed the children to nominate children they like to play with.

Helper (1994) found that children with disabilities have lower social status than their non disabled peers. Helper also found that children with learning disabilities interact with non disabled peers despite rejection and exclusion. The self perception of children with learning disabilities are unrealistic. Girls with learning disabilities have lowed social status and experience the most rejection.

Prater, Serna and Nakamura (1999) examined the impact of peer teaching on the acquisition of social skills by adolescents with learning disabilities. The study was of 17, seventh grade students, receiving special education services in Hawaii. Three students were female and fourteen males. This was a diverse middle class environment. The teacher reported that all the students lacked social skills.

Three social skills were selected for their study: positive feedback, contributing to discussions and accepting negative feedback. The students served as peer teachers and were also taught teaching interactions. The target behaviors were selected by the special education teachers. The teachers believe that these skills would aid the students' interactions with peers and teachers, in and out of the classroom.

Each social skill area was taught in one to five, 20 minute sessions. Training was

concluded when all students could perform the social skills with 100% accuracy. Teachers were given a questionnaire at the end to rate whether or not the social skills had improved.

The students, who served as peer trainers, showed a great increase (83% per teachers) in social skills. The students who were teacher-taught improved 55% versus those who were peer taught improved 66%. All students improved their social skills. The students taught by peers acquired the skills slightly faster than the teacher taught skills. Peer teaching appeared to improve social interactions students with learning disabilities.

Ronning and Nabuzoka (1993) studied children with mild to moderate disabilities together with their non disabled peers. They developed a research program designed to improve social interactions. There were 8 participants, 2 girls and 6 boys. There were from 8 to 12 years old.

The study was conducted in two settings. One was the experimental setting and the other a natural setting. In the experimental setting, the participants, participated in free play with general education peers in the school. In the natural setting the participants participated in play in a park (Ronning and Nabuzoka, 1993).

There were seven phases in this study. Each phase was designed to promote social interactions. The first was the baseline phase, where the students were instructed engage in free play. The second was the social skills training phase. In this phase, the children with disabilities were given a 20 minute training on social play skills prior to the free play period. The third phase was the play skills training and prompting. In this

phase, the children were still given social skills training but in addition, the teacher prompted them to play. The fourth phase was the second baseline. Children were again allowed to free play with no instructions. The fifth phase was the "Special Friends Approach," where the regular education children were taught about including the children with disabilities in their play. The sixth phase was the third baseline, one month later and a six month follow up (Ronning and Nabuzoka, 1993).

Ronning and Nabuzoka (1993) found that the social interactions of the children with disabilities increased during the interventions. Most of the increase in interactions were positive. The children without disabilities increased their interaction with children with disabilities. The non disabled peers exhibited more helpful behaviors with the children with disabilities in terms of play.

Yugar and Shapiro (2001) studied the methods of assessing peer friendships. The four that Yugar and Shapiro researched were peer nomination, peer ratings, reciprocal peer nominations and social networking. There were 174 children participants, grades 1st to 3rd. The participants were all assessed using self report. Parent and teacher ratings were also used.

Yugar and Shapiro (2001) found that only 4 of the participants did not have a reciprocated friend. They also found that the level of friendships increased over time The children reported to not have a group to hang around with were students receiving special education services.

Conclusion

Friendships play a major role in the life of a child. Children with disabilities are faced with the limitations of their disabilities in establishing friendships. Children with disabilities are limited in the peers that they can establish friendships with.

A child's perception of himself is affected by his social interactions. Rejection lowers a child's self image (Luftig, 2001). Children with disabilities are generally more lonely and have less friends (Margalit, 1996). As a child with disabilities gets older, his self perception becomes more negative. The disabled child becomes more withdrawn (Jerome, Fujiki, Brinton & James, 2002). Often times, the children with disabilities turn toward relative for friendships (Turnball, Blue-Banning & Pereira, 2000).

The limited quantity and quality of friends is partially due to the lack of access to peers. The research is conflicting on the best setting for students with disabilities. According to Heiman (2000), Children with disabilities have more friends in mainstreamed school than students in specialized schools. Research supports this for child care settings, as well (Buysse, Goldman & Skinner, 2002). The differences are noted in the gender of the relationships. Children with disabilities tend to pick girls as playmates more often. This may be due to the social developmental delays or possibly females students are more accepting of students with disabilities (Hall & McGregor, 2000). On the other hand, children with disabilities have more problematic behaviors in inclusive settings (Farmer, Van Acker, Pearl & Rodkin, 1999)

Due to the lack of peer interactions in school, the home environment is just as important in developing peer relations. Parents believe that children with disabilities

need friends but are not very involved in helping their child make or have friends. Children with disabilities have very little contact with peers at home (Geisthardt, Brotherson & Cook, 2002). Youths with disabilities are aware of community facilities that support social interaction but most have their friends in school and not in their communities (Pretty, Rapley & Bramston, 2002).

Children with disabilities can benefit form involvement in recreational activities, like sports. Sports can help these children improve their self worth and self esteem, as well as assist them in development. It provides a venue for social interaction and play. Children with disabilities have shown improvement in sports, as well as social relations, when involved in sports (Castagno, 2001).

In order for children with disabilities to increase their social interactions, they must possess the skills necessary for establishing and maintaining friends. Children with disabilities often lack the social skills necessary for peer relations. Children with disabilities enjoy social skills trainings and become involved in the programs, especially if they are designed to their needs (Jobling, 2000). According to the research, peer taught training has demonstrated the most beneficial for children with disabilities (Prater, Serna & Nakamura, 1999). Most of peer taught social skills interactions increase positively. Children with disabilities learn to better interact with children with disabilities (Running & Nabuzoka, 1993).

Children with disabilities should be able to enjoy the benefits of a friendships. They should be able to adequately reciprocate a relationship. They should have access and knowledge to peers. They should feel less rejection from peers and more acceptance.

Children with disabilities should have many friends. They need more involvement from parents and educators to help them be a friends. They need more integration with peers in and out of school. They need more access to peers and they need more skills.

The children with disabilities are not he only one's that need to do something about this. Parents need to be taught about the benefits of their child having friends and the resources available to them and their child. Teachers need to be trained to teach social skills. Non disabled children nee d to be taught to accept children with disabilities. Everyone needs to be involved to help children with disabilities. It is a collaborative effort.

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